

News Release



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Hollister Hills State Vehicular Recreation Area

State's Off-Road Recreation System Slated for First Major Expansion in Decade

HOLLISTER – The 10-year wait to expand the Hollister Hills State Vehicular Recreation Area, long considered California's premier off-road vehicle park, will move forward following settlement of a lawsuit challenging the adequacy of an Environmental Impact Report prepared for the project, State Parks officials announced today.

"I am pleased that under Governor Davis' watch, off-roaders will be able to enjoy a much needed expanded riding opportunity that will benefit both riders and the environment alike," said California State Parks Deputy Director David L. Widell of the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division.

Hollister Hills District Superintendent Daniel Dungy said, "I want to commend the many people who made this possible. It was a real team effort. I particularly want to thank members of the San Benito County Board of Supervisors, the county planning staff and the area homeowners, all of whom worked very hard with California State Parks to reach agreement. This is really a win-win situation for everyone."

The expansion is especially critical to riders because State Vehicular Recreation Areas have experienced a steady increase in popularity, requiring more space for them to enjoy their sport. It also comes at a time when there are increasing efforts to close or limit riding opportunities around the state. Surveys show that attendance at the state's six main SVRAs increased by 52 percent between 1985 and 2000.

Hollister Hills' adjacent property owners and others filed the lawsuit in May 2001 against California State Parks. It followed the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission vote in March 2001 to approve the final EIR on the project and amend the Hollister Hills SVRA General Plan to add two parcels -- the 1,570-acre Hudner property and the 1,690-acre Renz property, for development as off-highway recreation areas.

Under the settlement, which centers on parking and the management and monitoring of noise and dust impacts at the popular park, State Parks will:

- Not expand designated parking areas without conducting appropriate further environmental review;
- Submit expansion plans to the Hollister Hills Advisory Committee for its review and comment; and
- Provide increased signing and physical barriers to mark designated parking areas to assure that parking remains within those areas.

An important element of the agreement also requires State Parks to monitor noise and dust impacts.

According to the agreement, State Parks also will:

- Monitor noise and dust impacts at certain locations on park property at or near the boundaries of the Renz and Hudner acquisitions, and at other sites that may be selected in consultation with State Park noise and dust consultants and the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District;
- Develop and implement a noise monitoring and data gathering effort that will provide baseline information on the sources and amount of noise from OHV activities on the new acquisition areas, and use that information for a written ongoing program in areas identified as most likely to produce excessive noise;
- Conduct random pre-use noise tests, particularly on weekends, of motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles entering the SVRA. At a minimum the department will test the lower of 350 vehicles per month, or 10 percent of the vehicles entering the park. The tests will begin within one month of the signing of the settlement agreement; and
- Monitor and measure levels and sources of fugitive dust created within the new acquisition areas during the first year of operation.

Both sides in the dispute agree that the noise and dust management programs will be viewed as "evolutionary and, thus, subject to continued review and adjustment," according to the agreement.

Although it is not a part of the settlement, State Parks also hopes to finalize discussions with San Benito County and its regional emergency medical services regarding minimizing impacts to the County associated with ambulance needs at Hollister Hills during special events and busy weekends.

SVRAs are off-highway vehicle parks that are owned and operated by the state. Typically located just outside urban fringes, they cater to populations in surrounding counties. California's six main SVRAs have a total of more than 90,000 acres. OHV funding provides for staffing, maintenance of the parks, and land purchase.

Each SVRA is required to conduct extensive resource management activities and provide law enforcement, public safety, first aid, and search and rescue services. Most SVRAs

are significantly more developed than non state-managed OHV sites and typically offer restrooms, camping, shade ramadas and RV dump stations.

Hollister Hills is one of the most heavily used OHV parks and, therefore, one of the most intensively managed parks within the SVRA system. In addition to Hollister Hills, the six SVRAs include Carnegie, Hungry Valley, Ocotillo Wells, Oceano Dunes and Prairie City.

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